CAPTAIN BLOOD

by Rafael Sabatini

CHAPTER I.
The Messenger.

Peter Blood, bachelor of medicine and several other things besides, smoked a pipe and tended the geraniums boxed on the sill of his window above Water Lane in the town of Bridgewater.

Mr. Blood's attention was divided between his task and the stream of humanity in the narrow street below, pouring for the second time that day in the direction of Castle Field, where earlier in the afternoon Ferguson, the Duke's chaplain, had preached a sermon that contained more treason than divinity.

Bridgewater, like Taunton, had yielded generously of its manhood to the service of the Duke.

Peter Blood had read the absurd proclamation posted at the Cross at Bridgewater—as it had been posted also at Taunton and elsewhere—setting forth that "upon the decease of our Sovereign Lord Charles the Second the right of succession to the crown of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, with the dominions and territories thereunto belonging, did legally descend and devolve upon the most illustrious and high-born Prince James Duke of Monmouth, son and heir apparent to the said King Charles the Second."

Mr. Blood knocked the ashes from his pipe, closed the window and drew the curtains.

He was the son of an Irish medicus, by a Somersetshire lady in whose veins ran the rover blood of the Frobishers, which may account for a certain wildness that had early manifested itself in his disposition. A set of curious chances led him to take service with the Dutch, then at war with France; and a predilection for the sea made him elect that this service should be upon that element. He had the advantage of a commission under the famous de Ruyter, and fought in the Mediterranean engagement in which that great Dutch admiral lost his life.

In January, 1685, he had come to Bridgewater, possessor of a fortune that was approximately the same as that with which he had originally set out from Dublin 11 years ago.

That is all his story, or so much of it as matters up to that night, six months later, when the battle of Sedgemoor was fought.

The armies came into collision in the neighborhood of 2 o'clock in the morning. Mr. Blood slept undisturbed through the distant boom of cannon. Not until 4 o'clock, when the sun was rising to dispel the last wisps of mist over that stricken field of battle, was he awakened from his tranquil slumbers.

There in slanting golden light of the new-risen sun stood a breathless wild-eyed man and a steaming horse.

In that moment Mr. Blood recognized him for the young shipmaster, Jeremiah Pitt, who had been drawn by the general enthusiasm into the vortex of that rebellion.

"It is Lord Gildoy," he panted. He is sore wounded . . . at Oglethorpe's farm by the river. I bore him thither . . . and . . . and he sent me for you. Make haste, in God's name."

Mr. Blood went off to dress and to fetch a case of instruments.

CHAPTER II.
Kirke's Dragoons.

Oglethorpe's farm stood a mile or so to the south of Bridgewater on the right bank of the river.

In the spacious, stone-flagged hall, the doctor found Lord Gildoy. His cheeks were leaden-hued, his eyes closed, and from his blue lips came with each labored breath a faint, moaning noise.

Mr. Blood stood for a moment silently considering his patient. Then he called for water and linen and what else he needed for his work.

He was still intent upon it a half hour later when the dragoons invaded the homestead. The clatter of hooves and hoarse shouts that heralded their approach disturbed him not at all. But his lordship, who had now recovered consciousness, showed considerable alarm, and the battle-stained Jeremy Pitt sped to cover in a clothes-press. Baynes was uneasy.

And then they came rattling and clanking into the stone-flagged hall—a round dozen jack-booted, lobster coated troopers of the Tangiers regiment, led by a sturdy, black-browed fellow with a deal of gold lace about the breast of his coat.

"I am Capt. Hobart, of Col. Kirke's dragoons. What rebels do you harbor?"

The yeoman took alarm at that ferocious truculence. It expressed itself in his trembling voice.

"I . . . I am no harborer of rebels, sir. This wounded gentleman . . ."

"I can see for myself. The captain stamped forward to the day-bed, and scowled down upon the gray-faced sufferer.

"Out with him, my lads."

Mr. Blood got between the day-bed and the troopers.

"In the name of humanity, sir!" said he, in a note of anger. "This is England, not Tangiers. The gentleman is in sore case. He may not be moved without peril to his life."

Capt. Hobart was amused.

"Who the hell may you be?" he exploded.

"My name is Blood, sir—Peter Blood, at your service."

"What brings you here, sir?"

"This wounded gentleman. I was fetched to attend him. I am a physician practicing my calling in the town of Bridgewater."

The captain sneered. "Which you reached by way of Lyme Regis in the following of your bastard duke."

It was Mr. Blood's turn to sneer. "If your wit were as big as your voice, my dear, it's the great man you'd be by this."

For a moment the dragoon was speechless. The color deepened in his face.

"You may find me great enough to hang you."

And then his lordship spoke for himself, in a weak voice.

"I make no concealment of my association with the Duke of Monmouth. I'll take the consequences. But, if you please, I'll take them after trial—by my peers."

"Take up the day-bed," said Capt. Hobart, "and convey him on that to Bridgewater. Lodge him in the gaol until I take order about him."

Gildoy made a feeble effort to put forth a hand toward Mr. Blood. "Sir," he said, "you leave me in PETERSON—MACHINE NO 6—your debt. If I live I shall study how to discharge it."

As his lorship was carried out, the captain became brisk. He turned upon the yeoman.

"What other cursed rebels do you harbor?"

"None other, sir. His lordship . . ."

But the captain did not heed him. He was stooping to pick up a soiled and dusty hat in which there was pinned a little bunch of oak leaves. It had been lying near the clothes-press in which the unfortunate Pitt had taken refuge. The captain smiled malevolently.

Then the captain stepped to the press, and pulled open one of the wings of its massive oaken door. He took the huddled inmate by the collar of his doublet, and lugged him out into the open.

The soldiers trailed out by the door leading to the interior. Mr. Blood was thrust by his guards into the courtyard. From the threshold of the hall, he looked back at Capt. Hobart, and his sapphire eyes were blazing.

CHAPTER III.
The Lord Chief Justice.

It was not until two months later—on the 19th of September—that Peter Blood was brought to trial upon a charge of high treason. Two months of inhuman, unspeakable imprisonment had moved his mind to a cold and deadly hatred of King James and his representatives.

His chain companion on that march to prison had been the same Jeremy Pitt who had been the agent of his present misfortunes. The young shipmaster had remained his close companion after their common arrest.

The hall, even to the galleries—thronged with spectators, most of whom were ladies—was hung in scarlet.

At the upper end, on a raised dais, sat the lord's commissioners, the five judges in their scarlet robes and heavy dark periwigs, Baron Jeffreys of Wem enthroned in the middle place.

The prisoners filed in under guard. Mr. Blood considered with interest the 12 good men and true that composed the jury. Neither good nor true did they look.

From them Mr. Blood's calm, deliberate glance passed on to consider the lord's commissioners, and particularly the presiding judge whose terrible fame had come ahead of him from Dorchester.

The clerk called upon Andrew Baynes to hold up his hand and plead.

From Baynes, who pleaded not guilty, the clerk passed on to Pitt, who boldy owned his guilt.

The only witness called for the king was Capt. Hobart. He testified briskly to the manner in which he had found and taken the three prisoners, together with Lord Gildoy.

As the captain's evidence concluded, Lord Jeffreys looked across at Peter Blood.

Blood stood boldly forward, erect, self-possessed, and saturnine.

"Capt. Hobart has testified to what he knows—that he found me at Oglethorpe's farm on the Monday morning after the battle of Weston. But he has not told you what I did there."

The judge broke in. "Why, what should you have been doing there in the company of rebels?"

"I was there, my lord, in my quality as a physician, to dress Lord Gildoy's wounds."

"How came you, who represent yourself as a physician peacefully following your calling in the town of Bridgewater, to be with the army of the Duke of Monmouth?"

(Continued in Our Next Issue.)

Uncle Wiggily

UNCLE WIGGILY AND THE NUT SHELLS

"Dear me!" exclaimed Nurse Jane one day. "I never shall get it clean again! Never!"

"Are you speaking of Baby Bunty's face?" asked Uncle Wiggily with a jolly twinkle of his pink nose. "I know Baby Bunty's face is rather dirty since she ate that chocolate candy, but if I help scrub it"—

"Thank you, it isn't Baby Bunty's face that I'm speaking about. And as for Baby Bunty, the poor little dear has as clean a face as anyone," said the muskrat lady. "Haven't you, Baby Bunty?" she asked, for the little rabbit girl was there in the room, and she had looked at Uncle Wiggily in a strange way when he said that.

"I was only fooling," said the bunny gentleman, with another twinkle of his pink nose. "I know Baby Bunty's face is clean. But what is so dirty, Nurse Jane?"

"The hollow stump bungalow," answered the muskrat lady. "Since Christmas the animal boys and girls have been here eating candy and nuts and they're all over the place—I never shall get it clean."

"Do you mean animal boys and girls are all over the place?" asked Uncle Wiggily. "I only see Baby Bunty."

"Oh, you know what I mean," spoke Nurse Jane with a nervous twitch of her tail. "It's the candy and nuts that are all over the floor—more especially nut shells. The animal boys and girls dropped them everywhere. Perhaps they didn't intend to, but this place is so dirty I'm afraid it never will get clean."

"I'll help you," offered Uncle Wiggily, and he was so kind as to pick up all the nut shells from the floor, and Baby Bunty helped him. For, as Nurse Jane had said, the boys and girls coming in the hollow stump bungalow to show Uncle Wiggily their Christmas presents, had dropped many shells from the nuts they ate.

"Nut shells aren't very nice to step on in your bare feet," said Baby Bunty.

"You're right there, my child!" grunted Uncle Wiggily. He had to grunt when he stooped over to pick up the nut shells. "You're right, Baby Bunty. Nut shells are not good to step on. But we'll put all these in this empty shoe box, and when the ashman comes tomorrow I'll have him take them away," said the bunny gentleman.

Baby Bunty went out to play, and when Uncle Wiggily had put the nut shells in the shoe box Nurse Jane began to sweep and dust the bungalow. Uncle Wiggily carried the nuts to the kitchen, ready to put in the ashes, and, when he reached there he saw a pie on the table.

"Oh, ho! Nurse Jane has baked a pie," chuckled the bunny. "I'll eat a piece. She won't mind."

Uncle Wiggily went to the pantry and got himself a knife, fork and plate. He was going to cut the pie with the knife and eat the pie with the fork. Please do not for a moment imagine that Uncle Wiggily was going to eat pie with his knife. I know it is done, but never by Uncle Wiggily.

Just as the bunny gentleman was about to cut the pie a rough voice cried:

"Why don't you invite a person in to have a bit of pie?"

Uncle Wiggily looked, and there in the doorway stood the Blackcat—a chap like a big weasel, only almost as large as the Bob Cat.

"I want pie!" snarled the Blackcat, "and I want ears to nibble."

Uncle Wiggily tried not to shiver and shake, but it was hard work. Do what he would, his pink nose twinkled twice as fast as usual.

"Oh," said the bunny in a faint voice, "come in Mr. Blackcat, and I will give you a piece of pie. Do you eat it with your knife or your fork?" asked the bunny.

"What difference does that make?" snarled the Blackcat. "I'll take the whole pie, never mind the knife or fork, and then I'll take your ears."

"You'll have to take a few steps, first, to get me!" suddenly cried the rabbit. Then, with a quick motion, he upset the box of sharp nut shells on the floor, right where the Blackcat, with his soft and tender paws, would have to step in them.

"Oh, wouch! Oh, wow! Oh, wow!" howled the Blackcat as he felt the sharp nut shells on his paws. "Oh, this is terrible!" And with that he ran out of the bungalow, without a piece of pie or so much as a teeny-weeny bit of an ear nibble.

"It's a good thing I picked up the nut shells," said Uncle Wiggily, as he swept them up into the dustpan. "There is good in everything!" Then he twinkled his pink nose again and ate his pie.

So if the penny stick of candy doesn't fall in the box with the five-cent lollypops where they are too proud to speak to it, I'll tell you next about Uncle Wiggily and Sammie's trick.

We earn money and we spend it, and it seems to leave no trace, but the way we earn and spend it forms habits that make or mar our characters.